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U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
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AN ENQUIRY

INTO

THE PRESENT SYSTEM

OF

MEDICAL EDUCATION,

IN THE

STATE OF NEW-YORK.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED TO THE CONSIDERATION OF THE

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE.

BY AN OBSERVER.

ALBANY :

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1830.



AN ENQUIRY, &c.

For several years past, attempts have been made, to get the legislature to modify, or entirely to change, the established system of medical education in this state. We propose, briefly to examine this important subject. We shall endeavour to do so with impartiality, and candor ; and if we do not furnish sound arguments in favor of leaving the present system unaltered, we are willing to acquiesce in any change, warranted by reason, and sanctioned by the experience of this, or any other country. But, if, on the contrary, the arguments brought forward in favor of altering the medical laws, proceed from the speculative views of persons who delight in change, and neglect the warning of experience, or from motives of a less respectable kind, those of self interest, we trust the legislature will see the propriety of leaving matters as they are.

It is acknowledged on all hands that the medical profession in this state has, within the last ten years, made rapid progress in every thing tending to its respectability and utility. Students are now generally in the habit of attending lectures at the different medical colleges, and are every year showing greater proficiency in general knowledge. They are, therefore, compared to those that went before them, generally speaking, liberally educated, and prepared before they enter upon the active duties of their profession, to discharge these duties with credit to themselves, and with safety to their patients.

No system of medical education in this country, is so admirably calculated to promote the respectability of the medical profession, and to secure the public against ignorant pretenders, as that at present established in the state of New York. Indeed, it might be said, that in its general plan, it is not surpassed, if equalled, by that of any country. If a defect exists, it does not lie in the too great severity of the requisitions of the medical law, but in their not being severe enough.



We cannot however all at once, adopt such regulations as are enforced in most European countries ; but we have made gradual improvements ; and if left undisturbed for a few years longer, the medical profession in this state, will be as well educated, and as well qualified in all respects, as that of any other country. Of this improved state the public at large would reap the benefit, without any additional expense. For it is a mistaken notion, generally prevailing, that if the profession is to become more learned, fees would become higher. The most ignorant, generally charge as much as the more liberally educated. There is no proportion between qualification and compensation. The fees of physicians are not higher now than they were twenty years ago, when very few medical men had any other professional education than that acquired at the office of some private practitioner ; which was no education at all, compared to what is now acquired by most students of medicine.

If then the medical profession is every year becoming better and better educated, and the public has the benefit of the services of better qualified practitioners, without incurring additional expense, would it not be both imprudent and improper to disturb the present system ? and would this not be more obviously so, if it should appear that the changes asked for, would, agreeably to past experience, tend to send the medical profession back to where it stood twenty years ago ?

We presume that it is unnecessary at the present day to prove, that the safety of the public requires, that medical men should receive some professional education ; and should be required to go through some course of study, and give some evidence of their proficiency, before they ought to be entrusted with the care of the lives of our citizens. We all know that to become a good watchmaker, a good carpenter, a good tailor or shoemaker, requires years of application and practice. Can we for a moment suppose that an equal length of time is not required to understand the mechanism of the human body, and the manner of remedying its disorders ? Such is the business of the medical man. We know that watchmakers and other mechanics of the present day are a great deal more skilful than those of former ages. From what has this arisen ?—From this simple cause ; that every year, some-

body has made a little improvement, with which the rest of the trade soon became acquainted ; and the collection of such improvements in the course of ages has brought the several mechanic arts to their present perfection. So it is in medicine. The accumulated experience of ages is imparted by the teachers to the student. There is therefore the same difference between an educated student, and one who attempts to practice physic without education, as between a carpenter who is self taught, and one who has been instructed under a skilful master. The work of one is rude and clumsy—that of the other neat and elegant. The one spoils good materials—the other makes the most of them. So in medicine. The skilful surgeon saves a limb or a life—while the ignorant spoils the one, and often destroys the other.

Taking it therefore for granted, that the community at large, are duly convinced of the propriety of having educated medical men, in preference to ignorant and untaught practitioners, we shall endeavour to ascertain what degree of education is most useful to the public interest, and most compatible with the existing state of society. It is evident, that if a sufficient supply of medical practitioners can be obtained, to meet the wants of the community, at an expense not above their means, the better educated these practitioners are, the better for the public. It is better to have no physician at all, than an ignorant one. Let us then enquire whether the present requisitions are higher, than is absolutely necessary for the safety of the community, and whether they are so high as to deprive the public of such a supply of physicians as the exigencies of the state require.

By the law at present in force, every student is required to prove, before he can be admitted to an examination, that he is twenty-one years of age, and has studied medicine for four years. If, however, he has attended a full course of medical lectures, at some regularly incorporated medical institution, or has a classical education, he can be examined after having studied only three years.—Candidates for license are examined and admitted by the medical societies. The medical societies are of two kinds. 1st. Every county has a medical society, established by law, of which every medical practitioner in the county must be a member. Each county society has a power of examining candidates and of grant-

ing licenses. 2d. The state medical society, consists of delegates from the several county societies, and a few individuals elected by these called permanent members. This society is by law authorised to make any regulations for the government and improvement of the medical profession, that are not inconsistent with the laws of this state, or of the United States. Appeals are made to the state society, whenever differences exist in any of the county societies, or when candidates for license have been rejected by the censors of these societies, and feel themselves thereby aggrieved or unfairly treated.

By the peculiar organization of the state society, consisting of a member from every county in the state, we are enabled to ascertain the general state of public health ; what are the prevailing diseases in different parts of the state ; and what are the most successful modes of treating them. Information of the utmost importance is thus rapidly diffused, and a spirit of enquiry and improvement awakened, which might otherwise lie dormant for ages. In no part of the world is the organization of the medical profession so admirably calculated for procuring the most correct and the most speedy intelligence of the state of public health, within the whole bounds of the government, as in this state ; or so well calculated to throw light on the nature and treatment of diseases, and consequently to alleviate the miseries of mankind. It will be asked what good has it done ? What great discoveries do we owe to the medical system of the state of New-York ? Many important improvements we owe to this system. Is it a small matter that instead of an ignorant profession, we have now, in consequence of this organization, in every part of the state, intelligent, well educated practitioners ? Is it a small matter, that in consequence of *this*, the discoveries made in the most remote parts of Europe, and the improvements in all parts of the world, are diffused through the state ? Is it a small matter that the doctrines taught, and the discoveries made, in London, in Paris, and in Vienna, are within a few months after their publication, taught at a small expense, in the interior of our state, even to the humblest student within our widely extended bounds ? Such are a few of the fruits of the medical system of the state of New-York ; and as the profession becomes better educated, we shall see more of its advantages.

Such is the mode of getting licenses. There is yet another class of practitioners, of whom a more extensive course of study is required: namely, those who aspire to the degree of doctor of medicine. Candidates for this degree, are required to attend two full courses of lectures at some regularly established college, to undergo a public examination, and to write and defend a discourse upon some medical subject. If they have complied with all these requisitions, the professors of the college at which they have studied, recommend them to the regents of the university, and the latter confer the degree.

From what has been stated, it will be perceived, that if a student be poor and unable to attend lectures, he can be admitted to an examination for a license at the end of four years, without any other advantages than a private office affords. If he has attended a course of lectures, he is only required to study three years before he is admitted to an examination. If again, he has had still greater advantages, has attended two full courses of lectures, and had a good preliminary education, he can apply for the degree of doctor of medicine. To provide for the first class, every practitioner has a right to teach pupils, who at the end of four years are entitled to an examination before the censors of the state or county society. For the benefit of those who wish a more extensive, and a more complete course of instruction in the several departments of medicine, and branches connected with it, the legislature has established two medical schools—one in the city of New-York, and another at Fairfield. In consideration of the greater advantages these institutions afford for the improvement of pupils, over what can be obtained in an office, one year is deducted from the term of study of such as have attended one or more full courses of lectures. A student has therefore his choice, either to study four years in an office, and attend no lectures; to attend one course of lectures, and study only three years; or to study three years, attend two or more courses of lectures, and get the degree of doctor of medicine. He has it also in his power to attend lectures in the city or in the country, or in both, according as his means or his inclination dictate. One would suppose that here, there was latitude enough to satisfy every reasonable person; and facilities afforded to supply the public with practitioners of every quality that the wants of the

community could require: from the lowest degree of intelligence and acquirement to that of the greatest accomplishment and refinement. And that if there was any thing to find fault with, that fault lies in affording facilities too great, to fill the ranks of the profession, and not that the requirements of the law are too severe. Under the operation of this law, the character of the medical profession in this state, has rapidly improved, and if it is allowed to continue, there is every reason to believe, that it will be steadily progressing. The poorest student, if industrious, can get into the profession; while the wealthy, and educated candidates, have opportunities afforded them of getting as complete a course of professional instruction within our own state, as this country affords. This is as it should be. Every class is provided for.

Let us see how much the state and the profession could be benefited, by the changes prayed for. Some half a dozen individuals ask a charter for a college, with full powers to themselves and their heirs, to teach the different branches of medicine, and confer degrees, without troubling the regents of the university, or any other body. Another more numerous class, in the city of New-York, wish the present system to be entirely done away with, and that all should be allowed to teach, whether qualified to do so or not. As this last class, seem to be a little too much imbued with Miss Fanny Wright's principles, to receive much attention, in the present state of society, we shall confine our remarks to the application from the city of New-York, for an act of incorporation, upon principles altogether different from those which govern the other medical schools of the state.

This application comes from what is called Rutgers College. We shall first give a brief history of this school, and then examine the arguments for and against the application for granting its professors, a charter.

A few years ago, a dispute arose between the professors and trustees of the college of physicians and surgeons of New-York; they carried their quarrel before the regents of the university, but the latter being unable to get the parties to agree, the professors threatened to resign their offices, if the trustees opposed to them, were not removed. It appeared that the regents, even if they had the inclination, had not the power, to remove trustees

when once appointed. In consequence of this, the professors tendered their resignation, which was accepted. Most of the professors, however, soon repented of their rashness, and applied to be re-instated; but the regents did not see fit to grant their request. Another set of professors was appointed to fill their places. This was no sooner done, than the former professors began to organize a school in opposition to that of the state. A connexion was established with a literary institution in New-Jersey. The trustees of the latter agreed, for a pecuniary consideration, it is said, to confer the degree of doctor of medicine upon their pupils, in despite of our state authorities. Thus arose Rutgers medical college in the city of New-York. During the subsequent session of the legislature, a law was passed to prevent the interference of foreign institutions with our internal affairs, which rendered the diploma of Rutgers college of no avail to the holder, within the bounds of this state. Being thus again reduced to difficulty, the professors of Rutgers college, applied to several of the colleges of this state, praying to be taken under their auspices. By two of the colleges their application was rejected; but another was found not quite so scrupulous. Disregarding the expression of the feelings of the legislature, Geneva college took the professors of Rutgers under its auspices, and agreed to confer the degree of doctor of medicine on their pupils. As the legislature had established schools for the express purpose of teaching medicine, and had given to these schools a peculiar organization, and as it had never been contemplated that the literary colleges, under the general powers granted in their charters, should establish branches wherever they pleased, another law was passed, declaring degrees conferred by those colleges upon students in branch institutions, null and void.

Thus again checked in their career of ambition and opposition, the professors of Rutgers college applied to the legislature for a charter independent of the regents of the university and a board of trustees. Attempts have been made to excite prejudices against the regents of the university, in order to forward their views. The regents have been represented as aristocratic and tyrannical, and, as a body, altogether inconsistent with a republican form of government. If such be the case, it is very remarkable that such a body should have been formed subsequently to the revo-

lution, and should have comprised among its members, the most distinguished men of all parties this state has produced. How is this aristocratic body constituted? We should suppose from the manner in which it has been spoken of, that it was such a body as Rutgers college wants to be—a body having a charter and vested rights, above the reach and authority of the legislature. But upon enquiry, we find it to be no such thing; but on the contrary, deriving all its power, all its authority, from the legislature, and liable to be altogether destroyed whenever the latter sees fit. The regents of the university are appointed by the legislature, with a general power of superintendence over the incorporated academies of the state, and are entrusted with the distribution of the literature fund. They have also a slight authority over the literary colleges; and the entire controul of the medical schools. They can appoint professors, and turn them out, when they please. They receive no fees for their services. We may now ask, what is there so aristocratic in this body? Nothing whatever. We might as well say that the senate and assembly were aristocratic. All these are alike constituent parts of the government.

Why then this clamor against the regents? Have they ever used their power oppressively? Have they ever turned out a professor without a just cause? We know of no such instance, and we challenge the enemies of the regents to furnish one single case of that kind. Beyond the power of removing professors, neither the regents nor the trustees of medical schools have any other authority, than that of seeing that the laws of the state are duly complied with. It will therefore be time enough to complain of the power of the regents, when they are found to abuse it. At present we have no cause to believe, that any need fear the power of that learned body, except such as by their misconduct deserve to feel it.

Why then do the gentlemen not ask for a charter under the general controul of the regents, like the other medical colleges? If they object to a board of trustees, that may be dispensed with; some substitute might be found. The regents might appoint delegates annually to see that the students were properly examined, and that the professors obeyed the laws. There could be no hardship in this. The other colleges do not complain because they are obliged to comply with the laws. Ought the medical system of

this state, which is so excellent, to be abolished, because a few individuals would rather have their own way, without responsibility or controul? Was there ever such extravagant power granted in any civilized nation, to a few individuals, as is asked for by the professors of Rutgers college? We venture to say there never was. We know of no half dozen medical men in any part of the world with such powers.

We are now told by these philosophers, that mind should be free. There should be no monopoly of any kind. By parity of reasoning, every body ought to be allowed to practice law, that felt so inclined; every one should be allowed to preach, and be eligible to the charge of a congregation, who felt himself fit for the office. Every association of individuals, who, like the professors of Rutgers college, erected a building, no matter whether with the consent of the legislature or against it, should be allowed to commence banking operations, or issue policies of insurance, without the aristocratic anti-republican trouble of getting a charter. Every man ought to be permitted to speak in the assembly and senate, who felt qualified to do so; in short, according to their refined notions of liberty, every one should be allowed to do just as he pleased.

With such notions of the rights of citizens, the gentlemen, should have applied for a repeal of the medical law, and the abolition of the charters of the existing colleges, instead of asking for a new charter, *an odious monopoly*, as they term such powers.* A monopoly too, much more odious than any former ones of the same kind, in as much as it would be "accountable to nobody" for what it did or "neglected to do." This is not, however, the first instance of inconsistency in the gentlemen's conduct and opinions. It is but a few years, since they were the staunch advocates of monopoly, in the strictest sense of the term. Then, the doctrine was, that there ought to be only one great medical school in the state, upon which its liberality should be showered. But they then were professors in the state school; now they have lost their offices, and like many others in similar circumstances, are greatly dissatisfied with the existing order of things.

* While these pages are passing through the press, we find that these gentlemen have actually signed a petition to this effect. Matchless consistency! What opinion must they entertain of the body they are annually petitioning?

It may be useful, as illustrating human nature, to quote a few paragraphs from a memorial sent to the legislature by the college of physicians and surgeons of New-York, of which college, four of the present petitioners for Rutgers college, were at the time professors. The memorial runs thus : "The memorial of the college of physicians and surgeons, &c. respectfully sheweth, that your memorialists would not at this time intrude on your time or attention, unless the duty they owe to the legislature, under whose act they constitute a corporation, closely connected with the public health, had, as they conceive, indispensably called upon them to expose the reason why the interests of medical science in this state would be injuriously affected if the prayer of a certain memorial and petition, presented to your honorable body, by Archibald Bruce, M. D. and John Watts, M. D. and certain other gentlemen, their associates, should unhappily obtain your sanction. Once already your memorialists were under the necessity of addressing you against a similar petition ; and they hoped that the luminous report of the senate which condemned it, would have forever prevented a renewal of the like attempt ; nevertheless the associations of physicians, denominating themselves the medical institution of New-York, address you again for an act of incorporation. But the practice of all nations shows the impropriety of incorporating two medical schools in the same city, and that the advancement of medical science is best promoted by the establishment of only one. In the great cities of Edinburgh, Dublin, London, Paris, and Vienna, &c. there is but one in each. The history also of the medical school of Philadelphia, which never flourished until the two opposing schools united into one, as they are at present, affords a further and a striking illustration of the same principle ; and lastly, it is proved by the rapidly growing importance of the college of physicians and surgeons of New-York, since its amalgamation with the faculty of physic of Columbia college."

The above memorial was presented in 1816, at which time four of the present professors of Rutgers college, were connected with the college of physicians and surgeons. To show that the same sentiments prevailed down to the very day they ceased to be connected with the state school, we shall make two more quotations. As late as 1824, Dr. Hosack remarks in his introductory lecture,

that the state of New-York "cannot be blind to the obvious propriety of contributing to *one institution* that support which can alone make an adequate return to the community, instead of wasting her strength in various and comparatively unimportant county institutions." The self same year Dr. Francis, in a letter to one of the regents of the university, says, "Medical science will be ruined in this state if the regents augment the number of medical schools."

With what grace then, can these very gentlemen now come forward in the face of such declarations, and ask the legislature for a charter? What has taken place since 1824, to make it expedient to have two medical schools in New-York? Nothing, except that the gentlemen, by resigning their offices, have lost their public stations in the state school, and that they are desirous of getting new ones. Edinburgh, Dublin, London and Paris, are very much as they used to be. Each has one institution and only one that can confer degrees; indeed London has not even one institution that has the power of granting the degree of doctor of medicine. What is called the London University, has no such authority. All the other schools of medicine in that city, are private ones—just as if the physicians and surgeons of the New-York hospital, almshouse and penitentiary, were each to open a school for teaching students. The faculty in New-York has as much authority to teach as that of London or Edinburgh, if they choose to do so; but the power of teaching and that of conferring degrees, are two different things, not necessarily connected, nor indeed ought they to be. We are now told, however, (since the argument answers their purpose) that Philadelphia and Baltimore have each two medical schools, and that the city of New-York has grown so prodigiously that two schools are also required in it, although in 1824, one was enough for the whole state!! Let us examine the matter a little.

As early as 1820, the number of medical students attending the college in New-York, amounted to about two hundred. The number gradually *diminished* untill 1824, when four of the present professors of Rutgers college resigned their offices in the state institution. Since that time we have had the benefit of two medical schools in New-York, and we are told, that the aggregate

number of students at the two schools is greater than it ever was when there was but one school; thereby conclusively proving, according to these logicians, that two schools are more advantageous than one. To us, however, this is not quite so clear. We are told the city has grown a great deal, and we know that the country has increased in population; we also know, that students are more in the habit of attending lectures than they used to be; we therefore are inclined to the belief that the increase in the number of students in New-York, within the last four years, notwithstanding the attraction of two schools, has not been commensurate with the increase of the population. The aggregate has never exceeded two hundred and thirty or forty; and we have already shewn that in 1820, there were two hundred, although there was but one school, and students were much less numerous, and much less in the habit of attending lectures than they are now. The school at Fairfield, since 1820, has increased from 40 to 171 pupils.—Ought the school at New-York to have been stationary during the same time? We think not. To us, therefore, it appears, if there was but one school in New-York, and that well managed, there would have been, as there ought to have been, by this time, a much larger number of students in that city, than there is at present; and that the existence of two schools has been rather injurious than beneficial—thus showing, agreeably to the “*practice of all nations, the impropriety of incorporating two medical schools in the same city.*”

Let us now enquire how much medical science has been promoted in Philadelphia and Baltimore, by having two schools in each:—

In 1824, the school of the University was the only medical institution in Philadelphia. That year there were 424 medical students in attendance. Next year Jefferson college was established. In 1825 the University had 487 students of medicine, and Jefferson college about 100; thus showing the great advantage of having two medical schools in the same city. But unfortunately this apparent advantage was of short duration. Jefferson college has since been nearly stationary, while the University has been gradually, but steadily, going down.

In 1826 the University had 440 students.

1827	441
1828	419
1829	362*

In 1829 Jefferson college 112—this added to the 362 at the University, makes the aggregate number of medical students at Philadelphia 474 ; being less by 13 than what attended the University alone in 1825—and more than a hundred less than attended the two schools the same year. Thus showing the “impropriety of incorporating two medical schools in the same city.”

When there was but one school at Baltimore, the number of medical students had reached as high as three hundred ; now by the benign operations of two schools, the whole number of students at both does not much, if at all, exceed two hundred. Thus showing what sort of benefit is to be derived from the rivalry derived from the operation of “two schools in the same city.”

These facts tend to show, that there would be as much impropriety in granting a charter to two medical schools in the same city now, as there would have been in 1816, when the memorial above quoted was presented ; and it would be more creditable to the consistency of the gentlemen, and more in accordance with experience, to return to their old opinion, than to become the apostles of Utopian notions, of liberty and the rights of man.

It has been used as an argument, to induce the legislature to grant a charter to Rutgers college, that, in consequence of the disabilities that school labors under, students, rather than go to the state school, left the city entirely and went to Philadelphia. By referring to Hazard’s Pennsylvania Register, we find that in the session of 1828—9, there were at the University six, and at Jefferson college two students, from the whole state of New-York !† A mighty number truly ! We presume there is as many attending the schools of this state, from Pennsylvania.

* Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania, vol. 2, p. 112—vol 3, p. 202. This work is in the State Library.

† Vol. 3. p. 202. In twelve years, (from 1817 to 1828 inclusive) the number of medical students attending the University from all New-England, New-York and Canada, was 169, or 12 annually. Allowing half for New-England and Canada, there will remain 6 for New-York. Surely this gives little support to the argument. (See Hazard’s Register, vol. 2. p. 112.)

In conclusion, we would beg leave to observe, that if the legislature see fit to grant a charter to Rutgers college, on any conditions, a dozen other associations may be formed in the state, having equal claims ; and equally well qualified to teach. From the multiplication of medical schools the inevitable consequence will be, that students will be less carefully instructed, and less rigidly examined ; that from the number of institutions being increased, public patronage will be so divided, that none of them can flourish, or take a standing equal to the schools of other states ; and that in consequence, many students will leave the state, and receive their education at larger and more respectable institutions, elsewhere. A few schools may for a while continue in operation ; but will finally be abandoned ; and when reason and common sense resume their influence, we shall again return to a system such as at present prevails.

Experience, now sufficiently ample, shows that such is the operation of multiplying medical schools too much. To the weight of this experience we have the testimony of the very individuals who now, from selfish motives, wish to make the public believe that their former opinion was incorrect. Should the legislature yield to arguments adduced under such circumstances, it will furnish matter for *foreign nations to laugh and sneer at* ; to convince them that here there is nothing stable. That with us, laws are made and repealed whenever a few selfish and designing individuals raise a clamor, and preach up liberty and freedom of action in every thing, to answer their private ends ; and that reason and experience are only consulted when ruinous consequences are the *palpable* results of the measures pursued.

I therefore trust that before the legislature disturb what is ascertained by the experience of years to be exceedingly useful to the public, they will pause, and consider, who are the persons most active in desiring a change, and what would be the consequences of the change demanded, if the principle should be fully extended.

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